

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Sophia Lampe, I live in Cheshire, and I am the Director of Children and Family Services at SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS. I am writing in support of Senate Bill Number 2, particularly the section that relates to the Office of Early Childhood and Birth to Three (section 15), which is being considered by the Committee on Children this week. At SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS we are currently providing Birth to Three services to over 800 families across 50 towns in Connecticut. I am also the parent of a nine-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome and received Birth to Three from age 4 weeks to 3 years.

When the Family Cost Participation fee was first introduced over 10 years ago, the Birth to Three program saw significant attrition of families across the state as a direct result. Family fees pose a barrier to services, even when a sliding scale is implemented. Families in Connecticut are on very tight budgets and even the smallest additional cost may force them to make a difficult decision to forego their child's services. Connecticut is a national leader in high quality early intervention services using best practices, but unlike our neighboring states, we charge families for participation.

As a parent of a child with special needs and a therapist myself, I understand that there is a critical period for addressing developmental delays and disorders. By creating a barrier to receiving help, we are setting ourselves up for even more education investment needed in children as they grow older, for concerns that could have been addressed at an earlier age. In fact, for every \$1 spent on early intervention services, the state saves \$12 per year in future special education needs.

As a leader in Birth to Three, I am concerned that when the Family Cost is reimplemented, we will have a significant drop in enrollment which will have a negative impact on the financial viability of contracted agencies like mine. Financial instability in contracted agencies leads to instability in the Connecticut Birth to Three system as a whole. As it is right now, there are agencies that are suffering from the current economic climate and losing this number of children due to parent fee related attrition could be the tipping point.

As of 2019, the Family Cost Participation fee only covers 2% of the annual funding of Birth to Three services in Connecticut. By eliminating the family cost participation fee, Connecticut will avoid the drop off of families, ensuring that already financially overburdened agencies will be able to continue to meet the needs of families. More importantly, eliminating this fee would have only a small effect on the overall Birth to Three budget, but a significant positive impact on families of children with disabilities. It would not only leave them stronger financially, but also allow the most vulnerable children in Connecticut get the services they need and deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sophia Lampe